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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	EUR-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00
	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-03	AC-01	NSAE-00
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	IIP-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/016W

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3006
INFO ASEAN COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
NSC WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 HANOI 001308

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, INR/EAP
NSC FOR EAST ASIAN DIRECTORATE
SECDEF ALSO FOR ISA/EA/LSTERN
CINCPAC ALSO FOR FPA

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/11
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [VM](#) [DPOL](#)
SUBJECT: ROLE OF VIETNAM'S COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARIAT

(U) CLASSIFIED BY DCM DENNIS G. HARTER. REASONS 1.5
(B) & (D)

11. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO A LEADING
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN PARTY
CENTRAL COMMITTEE STAFF WORK, THE NEW PARTY
SECRETARIAT IS IN FACT A DECISION-MAKING BODY WHICH

SIPDIS
WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE GENERAL SECRETARY. IT DOES NOT
SIMPLY PROVIDE POLICY STUDIES AND PAPERS FOR BROADER
REVIEW BY THE POLITBURO. THE POLITBURO ITSELF IS
APPARENTLY MORE A SYMBOLIC INSTITUTION REPRESENTING
CONSTITUENCIES WITH TOO INFREQUENT A MEETING SCHEDULE
FOR IT TO BE AN EFFECTIVE DETERMINANT OF DAY-TO-DAY
ACTIONS FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. THIS SAME SOURCE,
WHILE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE ROLE PARTY GENERAL
SECRETARY NONG DUC MANH WILL PLAY IN DIRECTING THE

SIPDIS
PARTY, BELIEVES MANH HAS NOT YET BEEN TESTED AS A
LEADER CAPABLE OF BRIDGING THE DIFFERING VIEWS OF
VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE PARTY. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) DURING THE COURSE OF A SEPARATE DISCUSSION ON
BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH NGUYEN THU DO, SENIOR EXPERT
ON AMERICAS ISSUES IN THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT,
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DCM ASKED DO.ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
SECRETARIAT WHICH WAS RE-ESTABLISHED AT THE NINTH

SIPDIS
PARTY CONGRESS. HE ASKED IF THIS BODY HAD ANY
"POLICY" ROLES OR WHETHER IT WAS MERELY AN EXECUTIVE
BODY ASSEMBLING AND COORDINATING PAPERS TASKED BY OR
FOR THE POLITBURO AND THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

13. (C) DO BEGAN HIS REMARKS BY INDICATING HE
PREVIOUSLY HAD WORKED FOR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AS A
STAFF EXPERT FOR ABOUT A DECADE AND SAID THE PARTY
STRUCTURE HAD BEEN EVOLVING OVER THE YEARS,
PARTICULARLY SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION
AND THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COMMUNIST REGIMES. DURING
THE EARLIER PERIOD, THE SECRETARIAT HAD

RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO COORDINATING ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER COMMUNIST PARTY ORGANIZATIONS. THERE WAS A REGULAR EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION, PLANNING OF COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES, AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARTY-TO-PARTY RELATIONS. INSIDE VIETNAM AT THAT TIME, PARTY POLICIES WERE PARAMOUNT AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS SIMPLY AN EXECUTIVE ARM FOR THE PARTY WITH VIRTUALLY NO AUTHORITY OF ITS OWN. HE NOTED THAT THE LATE PM PHAM VAN DONG HAD SAID HE WAS THE LONGEST SERVING PRIME MINISTER IN THE REGION, BUT HE HAD LESS POWER THAN ANYBODY ELSE BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED ABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO ACT WITHOUT SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY.

14. (C) WITH THE COLLAPSE OF THE OTHER COMMUNIST REGIMES, THE SECRETARIAT BECAME MUCH MORE OF A COORDINATING ARM OF THE POLITBURO AND THE CENTRAL
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COMMITTEE. IT DID, HOWEVER, GRADUALLY ASSUME A POWER ROLE LINKED TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY. IT BECAME LESS AND LESS RESPONSIVE TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO.

15. (C) BECAUSE IT WAS ISOLATED FROM THE COMMITTEE AND HAD BECOME A POWER BASE IN ITS OWN RIGHT, THERE WAS INCREASING CRITICISM OF THIS BODY FROM OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND FROM WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. (DO REFERRED TO THE PREVIOUS SECRETARIAT AS A BUNCH OF OLD MEN FOCUSED ON THE PAST AND TIED TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY.) DOI MOI REFORMS IN THE LATE 1980'S HAD GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT MORE RESPONSIBILITY, AND THERE WAS MORE ACTIVITY ON THE PART OF MINISTRIES AND EVEN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THE IDEA TO CREATE A STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE POLITBURO AT THE PREVIOUS CONGRESS IN 1996 WAS THE RESULT OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARIAT AND A BELIEF THAT THERE NEEDED TO BE A BROADER, MORE INDEPENDENT BODY OPERATING AT THE TOP.

16. (C) THE SET-UP OF THE FIVE-PERSON STANDING COMMITTEE WITH LE KHA PHIEU AS GENERAL SECRETARY IN 1997 DID NOT BRING A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM EITHER. THE COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP, PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY, PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN, AND DIRECTOR OF THE FATHERLAND FRONT WHICH OVERSEES OFFICIAL MASS ORGANIZATIONS, ITSELF BECAME TOO ISOLATED FROM THE REST OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. IT WAS EMPOWERED TO ACT IN THE ABSENCE OF THE POLITBURO BEING CONVENED BUT IT LACKED A STRONG CONSENSUS OF ITS OWN. IT HAD POWER, HE SAID, BUT IT RARELY SEEMED TO USE THAT POWER EFFECTIVELY. THIS IN PART, HE ARGUED, RESULTED IN VERY LIMITED CREATIVITY IN DECISION-MAKING DURING THE LE KHA PHIEU ERA.

17. (C) DURING THE RUN-UP TO THE NINTH PARTY CONGRESS, DO SAID, THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF DEBATE ABOUT RECREATING THE SECRETARIAT AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ITS ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORITY WITHIN THE TOP PARTY CIRCLES. DCM ASKED IF THE NEWLY RE-CREATED SECRETARIAT THEN WAS SLATED TO BECOME A STAFF UNIT

SIPDIS
PREPARING MATERIALS FOR THE GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE POLITBURO AT LARGE, THEREBY TRANSFERRING THE DECISION-MAKING ROLE OF THE FIVE-MEMBER STANDING COMMITTEE TO THE LARGER GROUP FOR ACTION. DO SAID THIS WAS NOT THE CASE AT ALL. THE POLITBURO, HE ASSERTED, IS JUST "A BUNCH OF HATS." THEY REPRESENT "CONSTITUENCIES" WITHIN VIETNAM. "THE INDIVIDUALS HAVE STATUS AND PRESTIGE, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE CHIEF POWER," HE SAID. "THEY MEET AT BEST ONCE A
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WEEK, MORE LIKELY ONLY ONCE A MONTH OR SO." REAL
"DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY" IS IN FACT VESTED "IN THE SECRETARIAT AND THE GENERAL SECRETARY" WITHIN THE

SIPDIS
BROADLY ESTABLISHED PARTY GUIDELINES SET DOWN BY THE POLITBURO AND THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. "THIS IS WHY," HE SAID, "VU KHOAN'S ROLE (AS HEAD OF THE SECRETARIAT) IS SO IMPORTANT TODAY." SECRETARIAT MEMBERSHIP IS ALSO REFLECTIVE OF CONSTITUENCIES, BUT THE GENERALLY YOUNGER FIGURES OCCUPYING THOSE POSITIONS MEANS A MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO POLICY WILL BE POSSIBLE IN THE FUTURE. (COMMENT: DO PROBABLY IS REFLECTING HERE MORE THE HOPE OF WHAT THE SECRETARIAT MIGHT BECOME, BECAUSE OF ITS COMPOSITION, THAN THE ACTUAL POWER ROLE IT HAS CURRENTLY ASSUMED. END COMMENT)

18. (C) DCM ASKED DO IF HE SENSED THERE HAD ALREADY BEEN SIGNS OF CHANGE IN THIS RESPECT SINCE THE NEW

GROUP HAD ASSUMED POWER. DO SAID HE FELT THE SIGNS WERE OPTIMISTIC AND HE HAD "GOOD FEELINGS" ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP OF NONG DUC MANH. AFTER A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF MANH IN LEADING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO BE A MORE ASSERTIVE BODY IN THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE, DO CONCLUDED THAT MANH WAS CLEARLY A "GOOD LISTENER." HE IS "OPEN TO A WIDE RANGE OF IDEAS," HE SAID, "BUT WE HAVE YET TO SEE ENOUGH OF HIM AS A DECISION-MAKER TO BE ABLE TO DECIDE HOW WELL HE WILL DO." WHEN HE WAS RUNNING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THERE WERE NOT A LOT OF TRULY BIG ISSUES THAT HAD TO BE RESOLVED. "THERE ARE STILL A LOT OF GROUPS AND CONSTITUENCIES WHICH MUST BE HEARD AND THEIR VIEWS BALANCED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO KEEP THEM

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ALL PART OF THE CONSENSUS ON PARTY POLICIES." DO IMPLIED THIS WOULD NOT BE AN EASY TASK AND, WHILE HE IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT MANH'S ABILITIES, HE REMAINS UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW WELL MANH WILL BE ABLE TO PULL THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS TOGETHER.

PETERSON